



NEWS

Artistic Director: Dieter Kaegi
Executive Director: David Collopy

AN OPERATIC RETURN FOR O'CASEY'S CUP

The Silver Tassie
The Flying Dutchman
Mark Anthony-Turnage
Wagner at Sea

Contents

An operatic return for O'Casey's Cup	page 1
Mark Anthony-Turnage	page 2
The Silver Tassie, the plot	page 3
Critical acclaim for Silver Tassie...	page 4
The Flying Dutchman	page 5.6
Wagner at Sea	page 7.8
Opera Diary, Opera Insights	page 9
David Jones	page 10.11
Tassie composer to speak at Opera Insights	page 11
High Topseasorous! the career of an Irish Tenor	page 12.13
Dieter Kaegi	page 14
Opera on Lyric FM	page 15
Sixty Years a Singing	page 15
A real lady chiller, <i>Lady Macbeth</i>	page 16.17

Silver The Tassie

Mark-Anthony Turnage

THE SILVER TASSIE Irish premiere
Sung in English

Harry Heegan	Sam McElroy
Sylvester	Andreas Jaeggi
Mrs Heegan	Deirdre Cooling Nolan
Susie	Eimear McGalloway
Mrs Foran	Franzita Whelan
Teddy	Jeremy Huw Williams
Barney	Nyle Wolfe
Jessie	Geraldine Cassidy
Dr Cassidy	Declan Kelly
The Croucher	Gerard O'Connor
Staff Officer	Declan Kelly

Conductor David Jones
Director Patrick Mason
Designer Joe Vanek

March 31, April 2, 4, 6 & 8 at 7.30 pm



Wagner The Flying Dutchman Der Fliegende Holländer

Richard Wagner

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN (Der fliegende Holländer)
Sung in German with English subtitles

The Dutchman	Johannes von Duisberg
Senta	Claire Primrose
Daland	Stanislav Schvets
Eric	Timothy Mussard
Mary	Patricia Spence
Steersman	Richard Coxon

Conductor Laurant Wagner
Director Nicholas Muni
Designer Peter Werner

April 1, 3, 5 & 7 at 7.30 pm



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AN OPERATIC RETURN FOR O'CASEY'S CUP

Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie*, the play whose rejection by the Abbey Theatre in 1928 sent its author into permanent exile, will return in triumph to the city of its creation when Opera Ireland mounts the Irish premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's operatic setting at the Gaiety Theatre next month.

The opera was commissioned from the young English composer by English National Opera and had its world premiere there in February last year. Amanda Holden's libretto faithfully mirrors the action of O'Casey's plot as it tells the story of a group of young Dublin men at the time of the First World War. It follows them from their tenement home, into the horrors of the trenches, and back to the heart-breaking aftermath of paralysed limbs, lost loves and crushed hopes.

Cork-born Sam McElroy will sing the taxing central role of Harry Heegan, the young footballer whose on-the-field heroics wins the 'silver tassie' (tassie is a Scottish word meaning a small cup) for his team, but whose experiences in the trenches of Flanders, and his tragic disablement, bring him sharply down to earth. Other main roles in the predominantly Irish cast will be sung by Nyle Wolfe as Harry's friend Barney and Jeremy Huw Williams as Teddy, the bully reduced to dependency when he is blinded in battle.

Harry's flirtatious girlfriend Jessie will be sung by Geraldine Cassidy; Franzita Whelan will sing the role of Mrs Foran, the frequently battered wife of Teddy; and Eimer McGalloway will appear as the religion-crazed Susie. Gerard O'Connor, returning after his triumph as Boris Ismailov in *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, sings the important bass role of The Croucher, the mysterious watcher who quotes Scripture ironically over the men in the trenches in the opera's powerful second act

The opera will be conducted by Irish conductor David Jones, who makes his company debut. Former Abbey Theatre Artistic Director Patrick Mason, remembered for his riveting *Don Giovanni* here in 1988, will direct; and Joe Vanek, whose *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was widely acclaimed, will design the production.



2


MARK-ANTHONY TURNAGE

The Silver Tassie is Mark-Anthony Turnage's fourth work for the musical theatre, and his first full-length opera. Turnage, who is considered to be one of Britain's leading composers in any field, is noted for his lyrical compositional voice, his ability to create complex yet lucid instrumental textures and his dramatic sense. Born in Essex in 1960, and a composer from his childhood, he studied composition with Oliver Knussen and John Lambert at the Royal College of Music, where he won all the major composition prizes and received a Mendelssohn scholarship to study with Gunther Schuller and Hans Werner Henze in 1983.

Turnage's first opera, Greek, based on the play of the same name by Steven Berkoff, received high critical acclaim at its premiere in the first Munich Biennale in June 1988. Andrew Clark of The Financial Times commented: "This is the language of a born theatre composer". Greek has since been performed at the Edinburgh International Festival; by English National Opera in 1990; throughout Europe; and made its US premiere to great acclaim in Aspen in 1998. BBC Television commissioned and screened a film version of Greek and the CD was released on the Argo label in 1994.

Turnage's other triumphs include some orchestral pieces inspired by paintings (Francis Bacon's Three Screaming Popes and Heather Betts' Dispelling the Fears), books (William Goulding's Drowned Out and H G Wells's The Country of the Blind) and esoteria like football supporters' chants (Momentum). He has also written a saxophone concerto, Your Rockaby, and jazz pieces like Night Dances and Blood on the Floor.

Mark-Anthony Turnage is currently Composer in Association and Artistic Consultant to English National Opera's Contemporary Opera Studio, and he was Distinguished International Guest Artist in Residence at the Winnipeg New Music Festival in January 1998. In April 1998, a major Turnage Festival entitled 'Fractured Lives' was performed on the South Bank in London and Turnage was the Composer in Residence with the Avantil Summer Sounds in Porvoo in June of the same year. A decade ago he spent four years as Composer in Residence with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra during the heyday of the Simon Rattle era.



Silver. The Tassie

THE PLOT OF THE SILVER TASSIE

The action takes place in 1915, during World War I. Act 1 is set in a Dublin tenement. Harry Heegan, home on leave from the trenches, has helped his local football team to win a cup, the 'silver tassie'. He and his parents, together with girlfriend Jessie and his best friend Barney, celebrate by drinking a toast from the tassie, in which they are joined by some neighbours: strait-laced Susie, Mrs Foran and her short-fused husband Teddy. Then it's time for Harry, Barney and Teddy to return to the war.

Act 2 takes place at the front. The soldiers sing popular songs and reminisce about life back home, but they are reminded of the death and horrors surrounding them by the words of the Croucher, the mysterious watcher who quotes Scripture ironically over them. They start a game of football but are interrupted by a sudden enemy attack.



Jeremy Huw Williams
Teddy



Geraldine Cassidy
Jessie



Emer Mc Gilloway
Susie

In Act 3, Harry is in hospital back in Dublin, paralysed and confined to a wheelchair. Erstwhile neighbour Susie, now a nurse and sexually thawed enough to openly flirt with the doctor has helped him come to terms with his injury. Harry's parents and Barney visit him. But Jessie stays away.

Act 4 takes place at the football club, during a victory to celebrate the winning of the silver tassie. Harry is consoled by Teddy, now blinded and totally dependent on his wife. Barney, who saved Harry's life in battle, is having an affair with Jessie. The two men fight and Harry is thrown out of his wheelchair. He flings the tassie to the ground and leaves with Teddy. The silver tassie, once the sign of youth and strength and victory, lies buckled and bent on the floor.



Critical Acclaim for the World Premiere of *The Silver Tassie*

The world premiere of *The Silver Tassie* at English National Opera on February 16, 2000 received with rave reviews from the UK press:

"We're all up for this shining cup. Just in case there should be any doubt, the premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's new opera on Wednesday was a resounding, inspiring triumph"

Rodent Milnes, *The Times*

"The *Silver Tassie* is a triumph, Turnage's finest work for the stage to date."

Keith Potter, *Independent*

"From the horror of the trenches comes a beautiful new opera with heart, mind and legs."

Rupert Christiansen, *Daily Telegraph*

"This triumphant new opera is a silver cup-winner... It is the first major English opera for years that one can believe will find a place in the repertory and in the hearts of audiences, because the music has heart, is written with an understanding of singers and provides a moving and enlightening musico-dramatic experience."

Michael Kennedy, *The Sunday Telegraph*

"Turnage's deft and precise handling of mood and character sang out."

Fiona Maddocks, *The Observer*

"It is a magnificent evening of music-theatre, and, I believe, a great new British opera. Beg a ticket..."

David Gillard, *Daily Mail*

"The final triumph belongs to Turnage and his librettist who have taken a difficult play and fashioned from it an opera that speaks urgently to the heart."

Michael Billington, *The Guardian*



Wagner

5

The Flying Dutchman

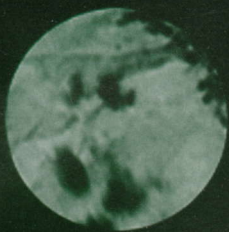
Der Fliegende Holländer

Act 1

The Dutchman and his ghostly crew sail into a Norwegian sea port. In a monologue, the Dutchman tells us that he is allowed to come ashore once in every seven years so that he can find a woman who will be faithful to him and thus break the curse. Daland, a sea captain who lives nearby, approaches and offers him hospitality. The Dutchman offers Daland a treasure chest and tells him that he is looking for a wife. Daland suggests his own daughter, Senta.

Act 2

While the other women sing about their menfolk at sea, Senta gazes dreamily at a portrait of the famous Dutchman. She has become obsessed with his plight and declares that she will save him. Her prayer that an angel will soon bring him to her is overheard by her boy friend Erik. Senta can hardly believe it when her father comes in with the very man she has been singing about. She and the Dutchman gaze at one another, wrapped in their own thoughts, both feeling that this is the moment they have been waiting for. The Dutchman asks if she consents to her father's choice, and she accepts him, promising to be faithful till death.



Nicholas Muni: Director Flying Dutchman

Act 3

The Norwegian sailors and their girls taunt the unseen and unheard crew of Dutchman's ship. Suddenly it becomes the centre of a storm and the ghostly sailors wake, deriding the Norwegians as they flee below decks in terror. Senta enters and is confronted by Erik, who reproaches her with having broken her promises to him. Overhearing this, the Dutchman mistakenly concludes that Senta has betrayed him and he orders his sailors to prepare for departure. Protesting that she is indeed faithful to him, Senta hurls herself into the raging sea, joining the Dutchman in death and ending the curse.



Johannes Von Dunsberg
Dutchman



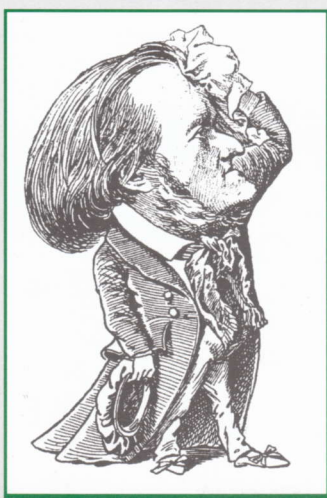
Stanislav Schwets
Daland

WAGNER AT SEA

The Flying Dutchman, the fourth of Wagner's thirteen operas, is one of the most vivid opera scores ever composed. And, as in all his operas, the imagery had sources in the real, physical world that the composer knew.

Wagner claims to have conceived the idea for the opera during a tempestuous North Sea voyage from Riga to London. It was when the vessel, to escape a storm, sought shelter in a Norwegian fjord, that 'the legend of the Flying Dutchman, the idea of which was already continually in my mind, took on a definite poetic-musical colour' he said. The calling of the crew as they cast anchor and furled the sails 'struck into me like a mighty consoling omen, and soon shaped itself into the sailors' song'.

The legend of The Flying Dutchman appeared in various forms in the early nineteenth century, but Wagner's immediate source was the tale in Heine's *Memoirs of Herr von Schnabelwopski*. It's a tale very different in tone from the opera. Herr von Schnabelwopski tells of a play he once saw in Amsterdam: a Dutch captain has sworn to round a certain cape, even if it means sailing on until the Day of Judgement. The Devil takes him at his word; he'll have to go on sailing until then unless he can be redeemed by a woman's faithful love. The Devil doesn't believe in the possibility of women's fidelity, and so every seven years the Dutchman is allowed to land and to attempt matrimony. Each time, however, he meets a woman from whom he's only too glad to escape ... until he meets Catherine, the daughter of a Scottish skipper.



But there Herr von Schnabelwopski breaks off: his eye has been caught by a pretty blonde in the audience; he retires with her, and returns to the theatre just in time to catch the end of the play: Catherine, true unto death, leaps into the sea, the Dutchman is redeemed, and his spectral ship is swallowed up by the waves. The narrator ends with a flippant double moral: Women, don't marry wandering strangers; Men, learn from this that marriage leads to shipwreck! But Wagner found his redemption motif here: from the lighthearted tale he created his serious, stirring drama.

The conductor Franz Lachner, who directed a famous production of *The Flying Dutchman* in Munich in 1854, is said to have grumbled about 'the wind that blows out at you wherever you open the score', It's true. The sea is ever-present in Wagner's glorious score. It surges out in the opening measures of the famous overture and continues to lurk throughout all that follows. It accompanies the Dutchman's ghostly ship ashore with a great crash, and it undulates menacingly during his brooding opening monologue, the first of Wagner's great Heldenbariton solos. It ripples in the melodic thrust of the women's spinning chorus and swells threateningly during Senta's ballad of yearning. Calm waters are suggested in the long, lyrical confrontation between the cursed Dutchman and redeeming Senta, but the menace returns when, after the jaunty sailors' dance, the Dutchman's spectral crew makes its presence felt. Finally, the sea bursts out with all its destructive might at the final denouement when Senta flings herself into the raging waters of the fjord.



OPERA DIARY

Spring 2001

Information as available at mid-February

Opera Ireland/Irish Times Lecture

Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre, College Green

Monday 26 February

The art of bel canto

John Allen talks about beautiful singing through the ages

Opera Ireland/Irish Times Lecture

Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre, College Green

Monday 26 March

The Silver Tassie & Der fliegende Holländer

John Allen previews Opera Ireland's Spring Season

OPERA INSIGHTS

Gaiety Theatre, Dublin

The creative teams of Opera Ireland's spring opera productions discuss their concepts and answer questions.

THE SILVER TASSIE Thursday 29 March, 1 to 2 pm.

LADY MACBETH OF MTSENSK Friday 30 March, 1 to 2 pm.

Admission free

Opera Ireland Spring Season

Dublin, Gaiety Theatre

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March 31, April 2, 4, 6 & 8 at 7.70 pm

THE SILVER TASSIE (Turnage)

Irish premiere – sung in English

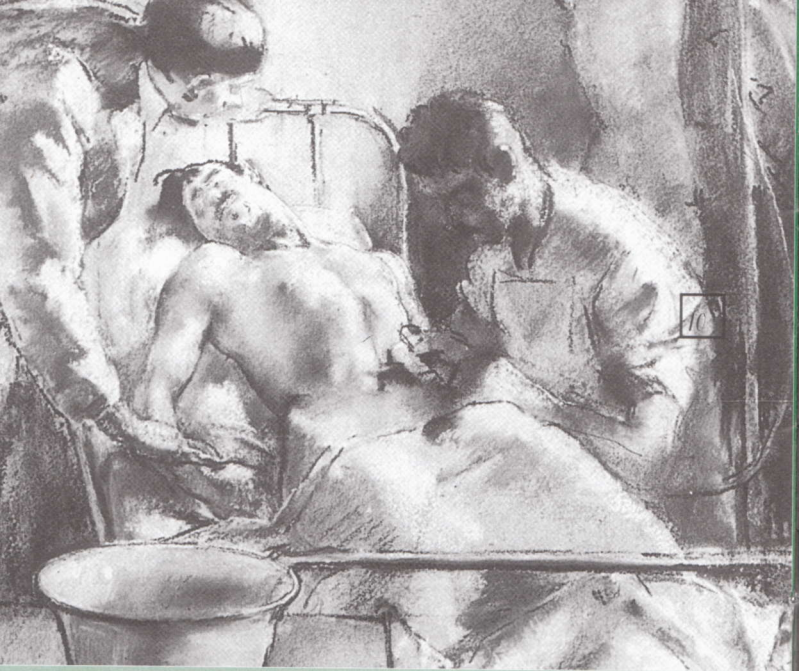
Geraldine Cassidy, Eimear McGalloway, Franzita Whelan, Deirdre Cooling Nolan, Andreas Jaeggi, Declan Kelly, Sam McElroy, Jeremy Huw Williams, Nyle Wolfe, Gerard O'Connor; c. David Jones; p. Patrick Mason; d. Joe Vaneck

April 1, 3, 5 & 7, at 7.30 pm

DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER (Wagner)

Sung in German with English subtitles

Claire Primrose, Patricia Spence, Timothy Mussard, Richard Coxon, Johannes von Duisberg, Stanislav Schvets; c. Laurent Wahner; p Nicolas Muni; d. Peter Werner



DAVID JONES

David Jones, who will make his Opera Ireland debut when he conducts the Irish premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's *The Silver Tassie*, was born in Northern Ireland and studied at Trinity College, Dublin. He continued his education at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester where he held a Junior Fellowship in conducting and won the Ricordi Prize. This was followed by a scholarship to study with Leonard Bernstein and Seiji Ozawa at the Tanglewood Music Center. He has also studied with Sir Edward Downes on the BBC European Conductors' Seminar.

He joined the music staff of Scottish Opera in November 1993 where he conducted performances of *Il Trovatore*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *La Belle Hélène*, and *Iolanthe*. During the 1997/98 season David Jones conducted performances of *Tosca* and *La Traviata* before leaving his position with Scottish Opera to pursue a freelance conducting career.

He has since then made his Netherlands debut conducting Haydn's *Il Mondo della Luna* for Opera Zuid and returned to Scottish Opera to conduct *Hansel and Gretel*. Last season he appeared at the Wexford Festival conducting Stanislaw Moniuszko's *Straszny Dwor* and conducted performances of *Carmen* for Opera Zuid.

He has also conducted *Die Zauberflöte*, *Le nozze di Figaro* (British Youth Opera and the Opera Company); *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for the State Theatre, Malta; *Bastien und Bastienne* and *Der Schauspieldirektor* for Music Theatre Lab, Glasgow; *Alcina* and *Albert Herring* for the Dublin College of Music; *Dido and Aeneas* and *La Voix Humaine* for the Opera Etcetera Company.

David Jones



David Jones has been Chorus Master of the Edinburgh International Festival Chorus from 1994 and has received high critical praise as a result of their performances at the subsequent Festivals. In the 1996 Festival he conducted the world premiere of the complete version of Kurt G Songs of Despair and Sorrow for which he received the following review in the Observer "his [Kurt's] music is immensely difficult to perform, but surely also immensely rewarding and David Jones conducted two magnificent performances". The performance was repeated at the Festival d'Automne in Paris and in the 1997 Edinburgh and Salzburg Festivals with the Edinburgh Festival Singers and members of the SWF Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden.

In the orchestral field, he has conducted concerts and recordings for BBC Radio Three with the Ulster and the BBC Philharmonic Orchestras. He has also appeared with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, the RTE Concert Orchestra and Chorus, the Manchester Camerata, the Liverpool Mozart Players and the BBC Singers. Last season he conducted a Gershwin programme with the Hannover Radio Symphony Orchestra on a successful tour of Germany and made his debuts with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the Northern Sinfonia, in addition to a return engagement with the Ulster Orchestra.

Tassie composer to speak at Opera Insights

Mark-Anthony Turnage, composer of *The Silver Tassie*, will be on the panel for the first of this year's Opera Insights at the Gaiety Theatre. These now well-established lunchtime sessions, at which the production teams of the up-coming operas talk to the public, and answer questions, will take place on the Thursday and Friday preceding the season.

On Thursday 29 March, at 1 pm, Turnage will talk about his approach to composing the music of *The Silver Tassie*. He will be joined by Dieter Kaegi, conductor David Jones, director Patrick Mason, designer Joe Vanek and lighting designer Paul Keogan, who will discuss their own areas of responsibility in mounting the Irish premiere of the new work.

On Friday 30 March at the same time, Dieter Kaegi will introduce the *Flying Dutchman* team, conductor Laurent Wagner, director Nicolas Muni, designer Peter Werner and Paul Keogan, who will outline their treatment of the popular Wagner opera.

Admission to Opera Insights is free.



HIGH TOPSEASORIOUS!

Paddy Brennan recalls the career of a great Irish tenor.

'It is incomparably the greatest human voice I have ever heard, beside which Chaliapin is braggadocio and McCormack insignificant. I have been through the score of *Guillaume Tell* and I discover that Sullivan sings 456 Gs, 93 A-flats, 54 B-flats, 15 Bs, 19 Cs, and two C-sharps. Nobody else can do it!' The words are those of James Joyce; and the tenor in question is John O'Sullivan, the Cork-born singer whom the renowned writer had first encountered in Paris in 1929.

O'Sullivan was born in Cork in 1878, and taken by his widowed mother to Rouen in France at the age of six. He sang in the cathedral choir there and in 1900 entered the Paris Conservatoire. In 1908 he joined the Moody-Manners opera company, under the name Louis Laurier, and made his stage debut in *Tannhäuser* in London. He returned to France in 1910 and resumed his own name, although he was usually billed as John Sullivan.

According to his own words, it was in Geneva in 1911 that his voice matured and his top notes were firmly secured. A dramatic tenor of exceptional range and power, he was based in Paris and made his operatic career around France, Europe and the Americas. Much admired, he had that rarest of operatic voice types, one which could sing the great high-lying dramatic tenor roles night after night, and in a stunning fashion. Unusually for a tenor, he stood six feet two and cut an imposing and handsome figure on stage. And from all accounts he was an accomplished actor.

O'Sullivan's career lasted to 1937 and covered over fifty roles, including Raoul in *Les Huguenots*, Rodrigue in *Le Cid*, Samson, Roméo, Radamès and, most famously, Arnold in Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*. This role, whose notoriously high tessitura he always sang in the original keys, brought him the greatest success during his career. He is documented as having sung a total of 589 performances of dramatic tenor roles in opera houses on both sides of the Atlantic. The late Maestro Napoleone Annovazzi, a man well known to DGOS audiences in former times, told me that as a young répétiteur in Switzerland during the 1920s he had coached O'Sullivan in the title role of Verdi's *Otello*. His most vivid memories were of a 'slow learner, but with a magnificent voice.'

James Joyce, as I have said, was a great admirer of his fellow-countryman. He was also a champion who frequently took up his pen on behalf of the singer. Indeed, in 1931 he instigated one of the strangest challenges in history on behalf of his idol – nothing less than a vocal duel with the Italian tenor Giacomo Lauri-Volpi, whose Arnold had been getting rave reviews. The letter, written by Joyce but signed by O'Sullivan, contended that Lauri-Volpi 'cut out more than half of the singing part assigned to him by the composer', and challenged the Italian to 'sing this role, without transpositions or omission, at any Paris theatre or concert hall, where I may be allowed to sing it also'. Lauri-Volpi, then the highest-paid tenor in the world, could afford to ignore the challenge – and did. Which is probably just as well, because by that time the Irishman was in vocal decline. He had been singing for over thirty years and the voice, though still powerful, had lost its sheen. O'Sullivan knew this and he was ready to retire. But Joyce refused to believe it.

John O'Sullivan made his only Irish appearances in 1930 when he sang in concerts in at Dublin's Theatre Royal on April 27 and in Killarney on May 27. The latter was a benefit concert for the city's cathedral, where a great-uncle, Thomas O'Sullivan, had once served as a priest before, it is said, succumbing to the temptations of Eros and absconding with a female parishioner.

In 1937, his 60th year, O'Sullivan gave his official farewell performance in Geneva. He sang Act 2 of *Guillaume Tell* and Act 4 of *Les Huguenots* alongside the Australian soprano Marjorie Lawrence, and earned himself a review which a tenor half his age would have been proud of: 'Mr Sullivan and Madame Lawrence were there. It was superb. The first has a generous voice, the timbre is wonderful. His top notes never show any sign of strain, even the most powerful notes never lose their colour. The metal is wonderful, without hardness and brutality. A magnificent tenor!' - [La Tribune de Genève 27 April 1937]. After retirement he spent his remaining years in Paris, where he died in 1955. He never taught, but as a man of considerable culture he was living in an ideal environment. His son, Jacques, had a distinguished career as a baritone in the French-speaking world.

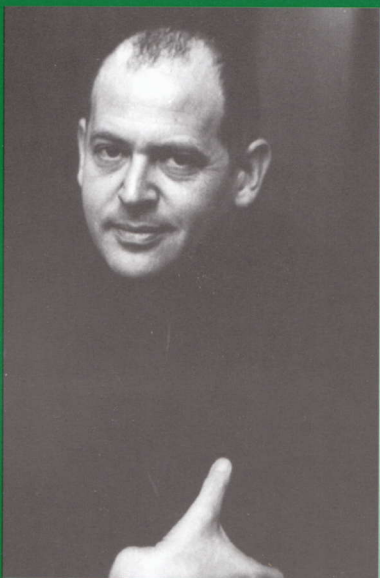
John O'Sullivan was never happy with his recorded legacy of more than fifty sides. His voice was too vibrant and resonant for the available technology of the time. Nonetheless, it is one of the most remarkable dramatic tenor voices on record and may be heard on a CD album published in 1994 on the Symposium label [No.1152]. More so than from his recordings, however, John O'Sullivan is likely to receive lasting fame as the protagonist in Joyce's *From a Banned Writer to a Banned Singer*. It was written in the style of *Finnegan's Wake*, if with less complications, as part of his advocacy for the tenor and published in 1932. In it, Joyce reviews O'Sullivan's operatic roles and compares him to other tenors of the time. In the final section, O'Sullivan appears in the guise of a workman, Geoge, who repairs a gas lamp while an illustrious trio – Enrico Caruso, Giacomo Lauri-Volpi and Giovanni Martinelli – gathers below to sing a tribute to the Joycean King of Tenors.

'Hats off, primi assoluti! Send him cantorious, long to lung over us, high topseasorous! Guard safe our Geoge!'

DIETER KAEGI

Stylish, sassy theatrical values grafted on to superb, sexy singing to produce an artistic experience that quite simply blows you away. Last year it was Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, this year Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. There are two of the toughest nuts in the 20th-century operatic canon, and nobody had been tough enough to put them on in Ireland, until Dieter Kaegi took over as artistic director of Opera Ireland and smashed all our outdated operatic preconceptions to smithereens. How did he do it? With unflappable Swiss calm. He just didn't want to do *Butterfly* and *Carmen* and *Bohème*, over and over again, he says. It took some time to convince everybody, but I think we've proved that 20th-century opera sells as well as the Top 10. Subtitles helped persuade a young, theatrically-savvy audience that opera doesn't have to be about namby-pamby comedies and *Nessun Dorma*. And he's not finished yet: spring will see a *Flying Dutchman* alongside *The Silver Tassie* the first time the company has done a work by a living composer and plans are afoot to do *Julius Caesar* and *Wozzeck*. Now that's what I call opera.

Arminta Wallace



Dieter Kaegi

SIXTY YEARS A-SINGING

This year is the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Dublin Grand Opera Society. It began operations at the Gaiety Theatre on 19 May 1941 with a production of Verdi's *La traviata* in which the principal roles were sung by May Devitt, James Johnston and Robert Irwin. On the following evening, Verdi's *Il trovatore* was performed by Moira Griffith, Patricia Black, John Torney and John Lynsky. Puccini's *La Bohème* was the third presentation. It featured May Devitt, Eily Murnaghan, John Torney and John Lynskey. The final opera of that first Spring season was Gounod's *Faust*, with Helen Paxton, James Johnston and John Lynsky, yet again. All four operas, which were sung in English, were conducted by Capt J M Doyle and produced by the ubiquitous John Lynsky.

OPERA ON LYRIC FM

(subject to change)

Lyric FM will broadcast Opera Ireland's production of *The Silver Tassie* live from the Gaiety Theatre on Wednesday 4 April at 7.30 pm. A recording of *The Flying Dutchman* will be broadcast on Saturday 28 April at 8 pm.

Relays from the Metropolitan era, New York; Saturdays at 8 pm

February 34, *Così fan tutte* (Mozart)

Diener, Graham, Upshaw, Groves, Gilfrey, Pertusi; c. Summers

March 3, *Manon* (Massenet)

Swenson, Sabbatini, de Candia, Plishka; c. Rudel

March 10, *Die Zauberflöte* (Mozart)

McNair, Dunleavy, Schade, Keenlyside, Cheek, Moll; c. Weigle

March 17, *La Bohème* (Puccini)

Gauci, Arteta, Lopardo, Finley, Patriarco, Bernstein; c. Crawford

March 24, *Nabucco* (Verdi)

Guleghina, Tarasova, Armiliato, Pons, Ramey; c. Levine

March 31, *The Gambler* (Prokofiev)

Guryakova, Savona, Obraztsova, Galouzine, Gassiev, Alexashkin; c. Gergiev

April 7, *Parsifal* (Wagner)

Urmana, Domingo, Ketelsen, Wlaschina, Tomlinson; c. Levine

April 14, *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Strauss)

Voigt, Dessay, Mentzer, Margison; c. Levine

April 21, *Lulu* (Berg)

Schäfer, Schwarz, Kuebler, Forbis, Devlin; c. Levine

A REAL LADY THRILLER

Opera Ireland's renaissance continues with a superb production of Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk. By HUGH CANNING


It is worth remembering that Shostakovich's second opera *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskovo uyezda* (The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District) enjoyed considerable popular and critical acclaim between its premiere at the Maly(Small) Opera House in Leningrad in January 1934 and the performance two years later at the Bolshoi in Moscow, attended by Stalin, which resulted in the famous Pravda denunciation "Chaos instead of Music" that ended the composer's operatic career. The Pravda "critic" wrote of its "deliberately discordant and confused stream of sounds. Fragments of melody... appear, only to disappear in the din. The music quacks, grunts and growls... in order to express the amatory scenes as naturalistically as possible. *Ledi Makbet* enjoys great success (because) it tickles the perverted tastes of the bourgeoisie with its fidgety, screaming, neurotic music."

It is for these reasons, of course, that Shostakovich's opera has been completely rehabilitated and vindicated today. *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* remains a dauntingly difficult and demanding work. In Britain, only English National Opera has staged it, in a dazzling production by David Pountney that returns to the repertoire next summer.

It is all the more astonishing, then, that Dublin's modestly resourced Opera Ireland has just given the work its Irish premiere, and performed it to a standard that would have been unimaginable even five years ago. Opera Ireland, first under a former Wexford boss, Elaine Padmore, and now under one of her protégés, the Swiss Director, Dieter Kaegi, goes from strength to strength.

Last year, Kaegi presented an excellent *Boris Godunov* (conducted by Alexander Anissimov and directed by Ansgar Hagg). It must have been the outstanding singing of the Opera Ireland Chorus and the playing of the RTÉ Concert Orchestra that emboldened him to tackle Shostakovich's equally demanding opera. Even Padmore, one imagines, would not have risked *Lady Macbeth* at the box office, but the public response to the Shostakovich has been overwhelming, and has obviously encouraged the company to take greater risks.

Next Spring, OI will mount the Irish premiere of Mark Anthony Turnage's *The Silver Tassie*. All this is greatly heartening news for opera in Ireland, and one's only regret is that accessibility to Opera Ireland's best work is strictly limited. Each production runs for barely more than a week, never to be revived. In the case of Kaegi's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, it is a tragedy, for this is a reading of Shostakovich's opera is quite different from Pountney's yet no less overwhelming in its theatrical and musical impact.



Kaegi is one of those rare directors from the German-speaking world who believes in strong narrative values, vitally important if you are performing *Lady Macbeth*, as OI does, in the original Russian. In collaboration with one of Ireland's most imaginative set and costume designers, Joe Vanek, and a lighting designer, Paul Keogan, who fills the stage with colourful and evocative light, Kaegi underlines the black comedy of Katerina's bored existence, her feelings of revulsion for her domineering father-in-law – whom she murders with rat poison – and her discontent with her wimpish husband, whom her lover strangles and bludgeons to death when he catches them in bed together.

Although OI can hardly afford "international" fees, they have cast the opera with great imagination and success. The Welsh singer Helen Field is a natural for Katerina; slim, youthful and sexy, but with a ruthless streak suggested by the steely edge of her muscular soprano. She is a wonderful actress, absolutely devastating in her haunting Act IV solos. Sergei was excitingly sung by the Moscow-based tenor Vadim Zeplichney. But the other really outstanding performance was that of Gerard O'Connor as the brutal, hypocritical father-in-law, Boris Ismailov: his big, resonant black bass is ideal for the role. He sings the part in the ENO revival next May.

Above all I admired the work of the chorus and orchestra, who played Shostakovich's astonishing score quite magnificently under Alexander Anissimov's inspirational direction. They may not be the Kirov under Gergiev, but in Dublin's intimate Gaiety Theatre their performance easily equalled the impact of the St Petersburgers at the Barbican Hall two years ago. A tremendous achievement.

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WE WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS!

We plan to include a letters page in the next edition of Opera Ireland News.

If you have any news or comments on the Spring 2001 Opera Season or other Opera related topics, Please send your letters, faxes or e-mails to:

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